

The Eternity of Hell Torments indefensible:

BEING

AN EXAMINATION

OF

SEVERAL PASSAGES

IN

Dr. Ryland's Sermon,

ENTITLED

"THE FIRST LYE REFUTED."

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

BY RICHARD WRIGHT.



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THOUGH the Sermon entitled "The first Lye refuted" did not appear to me to contain any new arguments in favor of the Eternity of Hell Torments, yet, as the manner in which it is spoken of in the Biblical and Theological Magazines, may lead many to suppose Dr. Ryland's arguments both new and unanswerable, I thought they deserved some notice. The following Letters were written to a young man whom I highly esteem. I am induced to make them public from the desire I feel of

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tributing, all in my power, towards the promotion of the true knowledge of God, and of evangelical subjects. I have no personal knowledge of the Doctor; as a good man, and a minister of Jesus Christ, which I believe him to be, I respect him; but, whatever respect we owe to men, we owe none to their mistakes. His Sermon, undoubtedly, contains many valuable passages; but there are others which appear to me of a very different complexion; upon the latter I have animadverted with freedom. If what I have written stimulate to a more diligent search after truth, whether the truth be found on Dr. R.'s side or mine, my end will be answered.

R. W.

AN

EXAMINATION,

&c. &c.

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

AT your request I take up my pen, to give you my thoughts on those parts of Dr. Ryland's Sermon, entitled *The First Lye Refuted*, quoted in the Theological Magazine for February last; with an observation or two on what the Editor of that Magazine has remarked upon them.

I have read the Dr.'s Sermon, and carefully examined those parts which are opposed to the Doctrine of the Universal Restitution; but they appear to me to contain nothing either new or difficult to answer, or indeed which has not been already answered: yet, for the satisfaction of my friend, I

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will state what I think a sufficient refutation of every thing which looks like argument in them.

The Editor of the Theological Magazine who, I presume, is one of those mistaken good men who rejoice in the ungodlike Doctrine of Endless Misery, introduces the quotations from the Dr. with the following remarks :

“On this part of the subject the Dr. is truly great. The arguments which he adduces are so clear and cogent, as in our judgment to defy every attack which can be made by the most subtle advocate for the Universal Restitution scheme, especially if he avows his belief that salvation is in any degree the effect of unmerited grace.”

I avow my belief that salvation is of unmerited grace ; profess not to be a subtle advocate, but a firm believer in, and humble defender of, the Universal Restitution scheme, yet, I dare undertake to attack Dr. R's. arguments against that scheme. The following looks the most like argument of any thing I find advanced by him in support of endless punishment.

“ The misery of sinners is represented as coeval with the happiness of the righteous. The same word is used in the original to express the duration of both. Matt. xxv. 46. If the former have room to hope, that *æonian punishment* means a limited duration of suffering, the latter must have room to dread, that *æonian life* may mean a limit-

ed period of enjoyment: for it is extremely improbable that the same term should mean infinitely more in the last clause than it did in the preceding. As this interpretation therefore can benefit none but the damned, so none should admit it, except those who mean to go to hell; and, O that they would consider their ways, and be wise!" (Dr. R's. Sermon p. 26.)

The whole force of this argument lies in the word *æonian* being connected both with the future misery of the wicked, and with the future happiness of the righteous; but it is easy to shew that this is no proof that the misery of the one will be of equal duration with the happiness of the other; if it proved *that* it would prove more; it would prove that all things which are, in Scripture, called *æonian* must be equal in their duration; but this would be proving too much, Dr. R. himself being judge: and we know that an argument which confessedly proves too much, proves nothing as to the purpose to which it is brought. This, I hope I shall be able fully to shew, is exactly the case with respect to the above argument in support of endless suffering. Hab. iii. 6. we find the same word applied both to mountains and to the ways of God; but is Dr. R. prepared to say that *it is extremely improbable that the same term, in this instance, should mean infinitely more in the*

last clause, than it did in the preceeding? Will he not contend that it must be so interpreted? Will he say that if the mountains cease to exist at the dissolution of the earth, which he believes will be the case, there must be room to dread that the ways of God will then terminate, and that from *that* time he will cease to operate among his creatures? I have no doubt he will maintain a direct contrary. Yet he must know that the same word, in the Hebrew, in the Greek version, and in the English translation, is in the above passage applied both to mountains, which will certainly be dissolved, and to the ways of God, which, he will admit, will never terminate. If Dr. R. must admit, which I see not how he can avoid doing, that, in one passage of Scripture the same word may mean infinitely more in one part of the sentence than it does in the other, according to the subject to which it is applied, how will he be able to prove that this is not the case in other passages, that it is not the case in the passage on which the whole weight of his argument rests? Dr. R. cannot be ignorant that both in the original, and in the common translation, the same word is applied to God, which is used to express the duration of various things which have long since ceased to exist: yet his conclusion has not been verified: *æonian* ordinances and statutes have been abolished; yet the *æonian* God continues the same; nor is the good Dr. under any

dread that *he* will ever cease to exist. The argument would be just as conclusive, if used by a Jew, to prove that the Levitical priesthood and ordinances ought never to have been abolished, but to have continued in force to all eternity (for the words *gnolem*, *æonian*, and *everlasting*, are used to express their duration) as it is, when used by the Dr. in support of eternal torments. According to his reasoning Christianity would be indefensible, as it is built upon the abrogation of *æonian* things, which, by his argument, ought never to have been abrogated.

Fully to obviate the objection, that if *æonian punishment* mean only limited punishment, then *æonian life* may mean only a limited period of enjoyment, I will show, independent of the word *æonian*, from the very nature of the life of the righteous, and plain declarations of Scripture respecting their perpetual enjoyment of it, that the happiness of the saints must necessarily be endless. Christ is made after the power of an endless, or (*akatalutou*) an indissoluble life: he lives by the Father, as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the son to have life in himself: and Christ is the life of his saints; their life is hid with him in God; they live by him as he lives by the Father: he told his disciples *because I live ye shall live also*. This life can never be dissolved because it is sustained by the immortal God: consequently,

from the very nature of the life which the saints possess through vital union with Christ, their enjoyment must be endless. Christ declared that those who hear his voice and follow him shall never perish; that none shall pluck them out of his hand; that his Father who gave them to him is greater than all, and that none can pluck them out of his Father's hands: thus their permanent security is not to be gathered merely from an indefinite word; and the word *æonian* is confessedly indefinite, as to the period of duration which it expresses; but the perpetuity of their felicity is founded upon the infinite perfections of the eternal God. It is said, they shall not come into condemnation; that when raised from the dead, they cannot die any more; that on them the second death shall have no power; that they shall be (*pantote*) always with the Lord; that the glory which they shall inherit will exceed *æonian* to an excess, or excessively exceed it. (2 Cor. iv. 17.) I challenge Dr. R. to prove in the same way, independent of the word *æonian*, that the misery of the damned must necessarily be endless: this I think neither he nor any man living can do: but if it cannot be done without that word, it is impossible it should be done with it; as every biblical scholar must know, that word is applied to subjects between which there is an infinite difference with respect to their

duration: as, to the levitical priesthood, and to the Creator of all things.

To argue for eternal torments as a guarantee to the eternal happiness of the righteous is both selfish and ridiculous. It reminds me of the conduct of those men, who, living in countries groaning under the yoke of tyranny, in the enjoyment of great advantages, and fattening on the tears and blood of the oppressed multitude, oppose the amelioration and happiness of whole nations, lest *they* should lose any of their exclusive privileges by a change in the situation of the multitude. Surely the gospel is calculated to inspire us with different sentiments; for it teaches us to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to consider every man as our neighbour; consequently, to be as desirous of his happiness as we are of our own; to expose ourselves to any risk, to make any sacrifice, for the good of others. How can a mind influenced by such godlike sentiments feel at ease while contemplating, even at the remotest distance, the eternal torments of millions of his neighbours? To contend that the endless sufferings of the wicked must be maintained, lest the saints should question their eternal safety, is as absurd as it is selfish: for if all sin and misery must necessarily be extirpated from among the creatures of God before the restitution can be completed, the cessation of the happiness of the righteous will be in the nature of

things impossible, seeing after such a restitution nothing in the least inimical to the perfect happiness of any being can remain in the creation. Again, the habits of virtue, &c. which will be confirmed in the righteous by the experience of ages of ages, can be hardly supposed, after all, capable of declension, the only thing which could endanger their happiness. Besides, if God, in the greatness of his mercy, will provide means that his banished creatures may not be eternally expelled from him, there can be no danger of his failing to provide for the endless felicity of his saints, who are a peculiar treasure to himself.

Dr. R. says that the interpretation which we give of the word *æonian* "can benefit none but the damned," that therefore "none should admit it, except those who mean to go to hell." This is strange language for such a man as the Dr. to hold. I would ask him, Can it be wrong to enquire into the real import of the words of Scripture, and to inform mankind of their real meaning, whether those words concern ourselves or others? Surely he will not say that the gospel contains a single word, in particular in the expression of its awful penal functions, which the real Christian will not be benefited by accurately understanding. Instead of declaiming against our interpretation of the word *æonian*, he ought to have proved its inconsistency; he ought to have shewn that it is generally, if not

uniformly, employed by the sacred writers to express endless duration; but this, I judge, even Dr. R. knew to be impossible. He has given no proof that our sense of the word *aeonian* can benefit none but the damned; I think the contrary is capable of a substantial proof, as that sense appears to me necessary, “to vindicate eternal providence, and justify the ways of God to men,”——to reconcile the penal sanctions of the gospel with what God hath plainly revealed in it of his own character and designs, and to harmonize the sacred writings; at the same time it appears to me calculated to remove one of the strongest objections of Deists to divine revelation, that it contains doctrines unworthy of God, inconsistent with his known character and perfections: while the Dr.’s interpretation libels the *Most High* by representing him as infinitely vindictive and revengeful. It is high time to remove such a stone of reproach, as the Doctrine of Eternal Torments is, from the blessed gospel, by a just rendering of particular words, upon which it hath injudiciously been founded. (By the way, I think no Christian doctrine ought to be founded upon single words, or detached sentences; but upon broad principles, clearly laid down in the sacred oracles.) Again, I think our interpretation of the word *aeonian* calculated to be eminently useful to real Christians, by leading them to more consistent views of religious truth, and of the works

and ways of God, by placing his character before them in the most amiable light, and so increasing their love to his name. I think it also calculated to be useful to unconverted sinners, by convincing them that punishment will be proportioned to crime; that by adding to their crimes they will increase their punishment; while the Dr.'s interpretation, by confounding all proportion between crime and punishment, has a tendency to lead sinners to conclude that, however much they may add to their sins, they cannot increase their punishment; seeing they can only be exposed to a whole eternity of misery.

I remain,

Yours, &c.

WISBEACH.

R. WRIGHT.

LETTER II.

DEAR SIR,

THE quotation from Dr. Ryland's Sermon, noticed in my first Letter, concludes with these words: "O that they would consider their ways, and be wise!" Does Dr. R. mean to insinuate that this benevolent wish can be proper and necessary only on the supposition that future punishment will be endless? Need he be told that an "advocate for the universal restitution scheme" can hold the same language with the utmost sincerity and propriety? The advocates for the doctrine of eternal torments have expressed themselves as if they thought there could be nothing terrible, nothing which sinners need be much afraid of, or very anxious to avoid, in hell fire, unless it be admitted that it will continue to burn, and that the wicked will continue to plunge deeper and deeper in its flames, as long as God himself exists! But surely hell may be terrible enough to alarm

the most hardened sinner, without supposing it will be absolutely endless.

These gentlemen will not say there is nothing in the gout, the stone, or any other bodily disorder attended with excruciating pain, which men need be much afraid of, or anxious to avoid, unless they have reason to believe they shall be tortured by it to all eternity. But why do they not say so? Because every man would perceive the absurdity of such a declaration; yet their not saying so, is one of the many proofs that men never talk so jejune and absurdly about the affairs of the present life, as they do about those which relate to the life to come. Dr. R. cannot help knowing that the Universalists represent hell as inexpressibly more dreadful than the most racking pains human nature is capable of bearing in the present state; yet he talks (p. 32.) as if they divested future punishment of all its terrors, and emptied hell of every thing alarming—of their beguiling their sinful fellow men with verbal criticisms on detached phrases—of their taking off an infinite weight from our motives against sin.

It ill becomes the advocates for the doctrine of endless misery to bring these charges; they stand against their own system, not ours: this I think capable of full proof. Universalists take, as a leading ground of “the universal restitution scheme,” the character, perfections, and designs of God, as plainly revealed in his word, confirmed by

the general tenor of Scripture, and illustrated by all his works. Is this like building on "verbal criticisms on detached phrases?" The advocates for the scheme of endless torments do not attempt to build their hypothesis upon the same broad and immutable basis; but on a few detached phrases, arbitrarily explained and applied. Universalists can support their doctrine by plain declarations of Scripture, independent of those phrases which require a critical examination in order to their being clearly understood, at the same time the most critical examination of Scripture will be found favourable to it; but can their opponents justly assert the same of the contrary doctrine? I believe they cannot. Universalists are in the habit of examining all the places in Scripture where any particular phrase, which they wish to understand, occurs, that, by the general use made of it in the sacred writings, they may judge of its real import: it is by comparing spiritual things with spiritual they endeavour to acquire the knowledge of the truth; while their opponents, in defiance of the declarations of sacred writ, build a system upon detached words and phrases, which outrages both Scripture and reason. For the justness of these remarks I appeal to what has been written on both sides the question.

I suppose it will be admitted, that the most powerful motives to obedience are the most weighty

motives against sin; this, I think, Dr. R. will hardly dispute: and surely he will not say the government of God is the reign of terror; that he is to be obeyed from a principle of slavish fear; that men are to be frightened into his love; that the dread of hell is the most powerful motive to obedience: yet he ought to admit and fully prove all this, before he concludes that the doctrine of limited punishment *takes off an infinite weight from our motives against sin.* Why do sinners continue in rebellion against God? I think Dr. R. would reply, Because they have no inclination to obey him. Why have they no inclination to obey him? I think he would say, Because they do not love him. Why do they not love him? Surely he would reply, Because they are strangers to *his* love; if they saw his loveliness, and perceived his love to them, they certainly would love and obey him. Can they be brought to love and obey God by having their minds inspired with tormenting fear? I think, the Dr. will say, No; nothing short of a sense of the love of God can do that; *we love him because he first loved us.* I think, Dr. R. if he speak all his mind, must make these concessions; but if these things be once conceded, we are fully acquitted from the charge of taking off *an infinite weight from the motives against sin.* I think the Dr. will further admit, that so far from the government of God, as set forth in the New Testament, being a

system of mere terror, intended to frighten the world into obedience, it has its foundation in love, is under the ministration of the saviour, is the reign of grace, and made known unto all nations, by the gospel, for the obedience, not of slavish fear, but of faith. If it be admitted that love is the only genuine principle of obedience, of course the most weighty motive against sin, will it not follow that the system which diminishes the infinite love of God to his creatures, and throws a thick veil over his infinite loveliness by representing him as infinitely wrathful and vindictive, is the system which *takes off an infinite weight from our motives against sin*, by diminishing, beyond calculation, the most powerful motive to obedience? Yet this is the Dr.'s own system. Thus it appears to me that Dr. R.'s charges turn against his own doctrine, though aimed at ours.

Dr. R. asserts (p. 32.) that all the labour of Universalists *is employed in a contrary direction to that of the inspired writers*; but this assertion only proves that *he* thinks the former give a very different statement of sin and punishment to what the latter have done: this is the very point in dispute, and it is not to be decided by bold assertions, unless they be supported by convincing evidence. I think, so far from the Dr.'s assertion being well founded, we have full proof that the *apostles*, like the modern advocates for limited punishment,

thought they could convince men of the evil nature and dreadful consequences of sin without preaching the doctrine of eternal torments. Let Dr. R. examine *the book of Acts*, and find a single instance, if he can, of the *apostles* ever intimating, much less plainly declaring, even when threatening sinners with damnation for rejecting the gospel, that future damnation would consist in an absolute eternity of torments: I believe he cannot find a single instance of this; yet had *he* to address such persons as the apostles addressed, he would no doubt think it criminal not to insist on the doctrine of endless misery, though the apostles were totally silent upon this point, when addressing unconverted sinners. How will the Dr. justify *his* mode of addressing sinners by the example of the apostles or *their* mode of addressing such persons upon *his* principles? It seems they thought the evil of sin might be made sufficiently manifest, and its consequences placed before sinners in such a light as would alarm their consciences, without maintaining that the punishment of it would be endless. Their preaching was attended with great success; many were converted to God while they heard them, without any thing being said about eternal misery to alarm their minds. I suppose Dr. R. will allow that we have a fair statement of what the apostles preached, and of their manner of preaching, in the book of the *Acts*; and that they ought to be viewed as

examples to all succeeding preachers of the gospel; both in what they taught, and in their manner of teaching; but if we have a fair statement in that book of what the apostles taught, it must be evident that it is totally unnecessary to preach endless punishment, in order to convince sinners of the evil of their ways, and bring them to receive the gospel: if they be viewed as our examples it must be quite wrong for us to preach that doctrine, at least to unconverted sinners, as we have no proof that the apostles did any such thing. The total silence of the apostles upon the subject of eternal torments, especially on such occasions as any modern assertor of it would think it highly necessary to preach it, is to me a strong proof that they did not believe that doctrine.

Surely, those good men who assert that sinners will remain in inexpressible torments to all eternity, do not, at the time they make the assertion, duly consider the import of the word eternity, or they could not dwell, with so much seeming complacency, on so dreadful and overwhelming a subject. *Eternity* is one of those subjects which exceed all finite comprehension. Were we to take the longest conceivable period of duration, and suppose it to revolve as often as we can find figures to express the number of its revolutions—were we then to suppose that number multiplied by the number of the stars of heaven, that product multi-

plied by the number of the spires of grass which have issued from the teeming bosom of the earth ever since the creation—were we again to suppose the last product to be multiplied by all the leaves that ever fell from the trees in autumn, and the product so produced again multiplied by all the drops of water in the ocean, and finally the last product multiplied by the number of the particles of matter in the whole universe, we can form no idea of the vast amount which would be produced; to think of so amazing a sum bewilders our conceptions, and overwhelms our minds: yet such inconceivable duration would be infinitely less, in comparison of absolute eternity, than a single moment of time is in comparison of such vast duration. In this I expect Dr. R. will acquiesce: how then can he insinuate, that, unless we say punishment will be eternal, we cannot represent it in a light sufficiently alarming to the conscience of the sinner? But I shudder at the idea of so gross a reflection being cast upon the parent of the universe, the Father of mercies, as the supposition that it is possible for him to punish finite offences with infinite torments, would cast upon him.

I remain,

Yours, &c.

WISBEACH.

R. WRIGHT.

LETTER III.

DEAR SIR,

THE *first lye* has been completely *refuted*, in every age of the world, by the evidence of facts; the certain knowledge which every man has of his own mortality, must be an unquestionable proof that the affirmation of the serpent, “ye shall not surely die,” was an absolute falshood: consequently, no formal refutation of that lye can be necessary. If the threatening, “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” be asserted to include eternal death, (which Dr. R. seems to suppose, which the Editor of the Theological Magazine understands him to maintain, the substantiating of which is essential to the validity of several of his arguments,) I challenge the Dr. to make good that assertion, by Scripture or reason; and until some proof be produced the mere assertion stands for nothing in controversy. I do not

think he can produce any proof, that future punishment will be inflicted on any man, as the consequence of the first offence; I think the sacred writers maintained the direct contrary, when they stated that men would be judged and punished, not for what Adam did, but according to *their own works*. If it cannot be proved that any man will suffer in a future state for the first sin, it can be no part of the *first lye* to say that man will not die eternally, because the *first lye* related to the effects of the first sin. To say men will not remain in a state of sin and misery to all eternity, is not what the serpent said to Eve, nor what she understood from his words; she was deceived by believing that she should not die at all, though she transgressed the divine command. What the Dr. hath said upon this point, has a tendency merely to raise a dust, and obscure the subject in dispute between him and the advocates for the Universal Restitution; but has no kind of connection with the duration of future punishment.

For the most admired advocates for the doctrine of eternal torments to have recourse to subterfuge and mere declamation, when opposing the doctrine of limited punishment, is, to me, a proof that endless punishment is incapable of being supported by solid argument: yet this, I think, is the case with Dr. R. in his Sermon, called *The First Lye Refuted*. The refutation of that lye having no-

thing to do with future punishment, it can never be turned into a proof of the doctrine of endless misery.

Dr. R. labours hard to identify *the advocates for the Universal Restitution scheme* with the old serpent, and their conduct with his; but to do this there are two things which he ought fully to substantiate. First, that endless misery is as plainly threatened in the New Testament as death was in the first threatening. Second, that the advocates for limited punishment deny that ever the divine threatenings will be executed. The former has often been asserted; but mere assertion is not proof. Detached passages of Scripture have been brought as proofs that endless misery is threatened in the New Testament; but when carefully examined, compared with their context, and other parts of the sacred writings, they are found to prove no such thing. The latter never can be proved, for *Universalists* do believe, as firmly as their opponents, that all the divine threatenings will be fully executed; so far from denying this they have repeatedly avowed it; only, not being convinced that God hath any where threatened sinners with eternal torments, they do not believe that eternal torments will be necessary in order to the threatenings of God being fully executed: and they are convinced that, if all the divine promises and declarations

be carried into effect, sin and misery cannot be endless: and, surely there is as good reason to believe that God will be faithful to his promises, as there is to believe he will execute his threatenings. However difficult to prove the above points may be, Dr. R. ought to have clearly made out the proof of them before he concluded a refutation of the *First Lye* to be a refutation of the Universal Doctrine, or insinuated that the teachers of it are doing service to the cause of Abaddon. (P. 33.)

To return to the passages quoted by the Editor of the Theological Magazine, the following is what he and Dr. R. seem to lay the greatest stress upon, and deem unanswerable. The Dr. says, (p. 26, 27.) “ Now I have entered upon this subject, let it be carefully remarked, that if those who die in their sins are saved at last, their salvation, come when it may, must be either *by* grace, or without it; *through* Christ, or without the influence of his mediation. Let, then, the advocates for universal salvation chuse their ground, and keep to it.”

“ If they say that the salvation of them who will be lost for an age, or for ages, after the day of judgment, will be at last accomplished by grace, and through Christ, let them reflect, that, by this concession, the justice of eternal punishment is admitted. Let such persons, therefore, beware that they never attempt to support their scheme by argu-

ments which imply the contrary. Let them beware that they are not accessory to the longer punishment of the damned, by sending them to hell with hardening prejudices in their minds, which will keep them from acknowledging their demerit, and their need of salvation by grace. And let those who are inclined to imbibe this sentiment seriously consider, whether it be safe to conclude, without a more express revelation than can be found in the Bible, that God *will* not punish sin, as long as he justly might punish it."

Why has Dr. R. like several other opposers of the Universal Doctrine, confounded restoration and salvation together, as if both terms expressed one and the same thing? Why are the advocates for Universal Restitution charged with maintaining universal salvation? It is not fair for our opponents to change the terms of the question, and call upon us to defend what we do not believe; for we do not believe in universal salvation, we do not apply the phrase universal salvation to the restoration; and those who profess to believe universal salvation, in the present day, deny all future punishment; but we believe that the impenitent will be punished hereafter. Our opponents seem unwilling to notice the distinction we make between restoration and salvation. How is this to be accounted for? Could Dr. R. be ignorant that the Uni-

versalists of the present day profess not to believe in universal salvation—that they distinguish between salvation and restoration—that they think the writers of the New Testament made the same distinction—and that they deem it of no small importance? If he be ignorant of these things he can have paid but slight attention to the present state of a controversy on which he, notwithstanding, writes with some asperity: yet I conclude that he must have overlooked this distinction, through inattention, otherwise I think he would have been more candid and ingenuous; but he ought to have informed himself of the terms of the question before he undertook its decision. In remarking on the above quotation from the Dr.'s sermon, I must beg leave to substitute either the word restitution, or the word restoration, where he has used the word salvation, as I do not believe that those who reject Christ to the end of their lives ever will be saved, in the sense in which salvation is now preached to them in the gospel; for salvation, as exhibited to them now, includes deliverance from the wrath to come; which all who die in unbelief must experience. This point settled, I will readily comply with the Dr.'s requisition; I will chuse my ground and engage to abide by it. Be it known then, that, without the least mental reserve, I avow my belief, that the restoration of all mankind to purity and happiness will be accomplished by grace, or the

free, unmerited favour of God ; that it will be effected by Christ through the influence of his meditation. In support of which belief, I select the following out of the many proofs which I conceive the Scriptures to furnish. We are told (Gen. iii. 15.) that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. (1 John iii. 8.) "The son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil." If the serpent's head be bruised, by the works of the devil being destroyed, it is a clear case, that sin and death, his principal works, will not eternally remain. (Gen. xii. 3. xxii. 18.) "In thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed:" which blessing consists in being turned from iniquity. (Acts iii. 26.) As there can be no individual of mankind but must belong to some family of the earth, and as the blessing consists in being turned from sin, it follows, that, if ever the promise to Abram be completely fulfilled, no part of mankind will remain in their sins to all eternity. (Isa. xlv. 23, 24.) *I have sworn by myself, saith Jehovah, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear, surely shall say, In Jehovah have I righteousness and strength.* (Phil. ii. 10, 11.) *That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

How can such language as this ever be verified, if myriads of myriads of creatures continue full of enmity to God, and blaspheming his name to all eternity? (John xii. 32.) *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* (Ephe. i. 10.) *That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him.* (Col. i. 19, 20.) *For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and (having made peace through the blood of his cross) by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.*

If all men be drawn to Christ, they will not be eternally separated from him; if they be gathered together in one, in him, they will not be endlessly scattered and broken; if they be reconciled to God by him, they will not remain in a state of enmity to all eternity. If Dr. R. should deny that the above passages furnish any evidence of the truth of the doctrine of the universal restitution, he must acknowledge that our using them as proofs plainly shews that we expect the restitution will be effected through the mediation of Christ; and this is the chief end for which I now refer to them.

I do not perceive that by maintaining that the restoration will be effected by grace, and through

the mediation of Christ, we admit that eternal punishment would be just, though Dr. R. supposes that the latter must be the consequence of the former; but I see no necessity to admit his conclusion; the justice of eternal punishment ought to be proved by clear proofs, deduced either from reason or Scripture; and if such proof cannot be found, we ought not to admit it on the ground of mere inference. I have no doubt but the Dr. has found, before now, that things which were deemed quite incompatible, were perfectly consistent with each other; and such, I hope, he may yet see to be the case with respect to the denial of the justice of eternal punishment, and that the universal restoration will take place on the ground of the divine free favour.

First, I will enquire *if we have any proof that eternal punishment would be just?* If it would be just, I know of but three ways in which the justice of it can be discoverable by us.

1. From its being perceivable, by reason, that the demerit of sin is unbounded, and, consequently, that it is reasonable to conclude, that the sinner ought, in justice, to be punished with inexpressible torments to all eternity; but to assert this, would be to contradict the most evident facts, the clearest perceptions of the human mind, that man is a creature whose powers are limited, consequently, whose virtues and vices must be limited—

that there are degrees in sin, and ought, in justice, to be degrees of punishment. The reason which God hath given us, and which he certainly intended we should use, unless perverted by system, must revolt at the idea of the crimes of a few years, perhaps of a few days, being punished with the most exquisite misery, not merely for millions of millions of ages, but so long as God himself exists. Such a doctrine outrages all our feelings, and contradicts our best notions of justice, as it leaves not the least degree of proportion between crime and punishment. Or,

2. If the justice of eternal punishment be discoverable by us, it must be by our perceiving that some principle exists in the Deity which will render consistent with his character the infliction of infinite punishment upon his offending creatures for finite offences. But from what part of his works, or of his word, can we perceive that such a principle exists in God? To impute infinite vindictiveness and implacability to the *Father of mercies, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works*, and who will ever be what he is, seeing he is incapable of changing, would be to suppose him transformed into the veriest monster in the universe. To assert that it will comport with that justice which emanates from him who is love, for him to be infinitely revengeful, and glut his vindictive fury with the inex-

pressible miseries of his rational offspring so long as himself exists—that infinite wisdom will please itself with breaking a fly upon the wheel to all eternity, would be to belie every thing which God hath been graciously pleased to reveal concerning himself, and to utter the grossest possible libel upon *him* who is worthy of universal adoration and praise. Yet, if I am not mistaken, these horrible consequences would follow the admission that eternal torments would be a proper punishment for the sins of this frail and transitory life. Or,

3. If the justice of eternal punishment be discoverable by us, it must be from God's having pointed it out as the wages of sin, and threatened sinners with it in the Scriptures. Our conceptions of justice may be erroneous; but what he hath stated upon the subject must be correct; and we are bound to bow to his authority. The law nowhere threatened sinners with eternal torments; the Scriptures declare the wages of sin to be *death*, not an *endless life* of torment; that the soul that sinneth shall *die*, not *live* in misery to all eternity; Christ hath nowhere said that he who believeth not shall be damned to a life of endless suffering; but he hath said many things by his apostles, utterly incompatible with such an idea. Hence I refuse to concede to our opponents that eternal punishment would be consistent with the justice of God; nor do I feel myself in a dilemma

by asserting, at the same time, that the restitution will be effected by grace, through the mediation of Christ. I proceed,

Secondly, *To offer some remarks on the nature of divine justice*, which may help to remove any difficulties that may be supposed to clog my hypothesis.

Perhaps Dr. R. and I may have different ideas of the justice of God. and this may lead us to form different conclusions. I conceive justice in any being to consist in his rendering to every other being he has to do with, that which is most fit and proper, most consistent with the rectitude of his nature, and most suitable for others to receive at his hands. I do not conceive the justice of God to consist in inexorable severity of conduct, in his taking all possible advantage of the errors and follies of mortals, but in the undeviating rectitude of his nature and conduct—in his rendering to every creature that which is most consistent with his own perfections—in his doing, in every case, that which is most right to be done by infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, for the preservation of eternal order throughout the universe. Though God is an absolute sovereign, and his will is supreme law, it cannot be possible for him to will any thing but what is wise and good, unless he can be supposed to will any thing contrary to his own nature; and, his will being the standard of jus-

tice, there can be nothing in his justice but what perfectly accords with infinite wisdom and goodness. If this definition of the justice of God be admitted, and I see not how it can be denied, I leave every rational man to judge whether it can be consistent with it to damn men eternally. It will perfectly agree with infinite love and mercy to subject rebellious creatures to limited and corrective punishment; but I am at a loss to tell by what arguments the infliction of endless misery can be proved to accord with that justice which is the rectitude of infinite wisdom and goodness. Further I remark that,

Thirdly, Dr. R.'s conclusion, *if the restitution takes place on the foundation of grace, and through the mediation of Christ, then the justice of eternal punishment is admitted*, evidently implies that grace cannot operate without arresting the arm of justice, and that what Christ effects through his mediation, stops the course of justice; consequently, if we can prove that these implications are totally unfounded, the Dr. will have nothing left to support his conclusion, and it will fully appear that we are under no necessity of granting what he claims. It must be highly dishonourable to God to suppose that he cannot shew favour to sinners without suspending his justice, and to Christ, to insinuate that the influence of his mediation interrupts the course of justice. The whole gospel

might be adduced as proof that God, in dispensing his favours, acts with the *strictest justice*, and that every thing done by Christ is done in perfect equity. I know Dr. R. will not say God acts unjustly when he shews mercy to sinners, or that there is any thing in the mediation of Christ which is not perfectly equitable. But if he dare not say this, how will he prove that the damned will not suffer what the justice of God requires they should suffer, though their reformation will be effected by grace, through the mediation of Christ? I believe they will suffer till the ends of justice, of which one is their reformation, be effected. Can the Dr. be ignorant, that it is a part of Christ's work, as mediator, to administer justice, to execute judgment? Christ will judge and punish the ungodly before the kingdom is delivered up to the Father; consequently, as mediator, that he may subdue them to himself. Grace and justice will co-operate in the mediation of the Saviour, until all rebels be brought into subjection, that, when the kingdom is delivered up, God may be all in all.

So far from justice being suspended, or the course of it stopped, when sinners are forgiven and purified, that an apostle has declared that God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John. i. 9.; and the Saviour is called the just one, Acts, iii. 14.; but if justice operates in forgiving and

purifying sinners, when they are properly humbled, surely it would not be consistent with justice for such to be damned eternally.

I think Dr. R.'s mistake arises from his supposing that the justice of God consists in his giving to every one of those who die in their sins according to the strict demerit of their conduct; this is not to be concluded from the declaration "who will render to every one according to his deeds," for the Dr. knows that this will apply to the case of the righteous as well as that of the wicked; but he does not believe that God's rendering to the former according to their deeds, intends according to the strict merit of their conduct; then why should his doing so to the latter be construed to mean according to their absolute demerit? If divine justice required that sinners should receive according to their demerits, it could not be an act of justice to pardon the guilty, nor could mercy have to do with God's giving to every man according to his works, which (Psalm lxii. 12.) is declared to be the case. Will not Dr. R. admit that God hath never failed to do what justice required? and that he hath never, in a single instance, not even in the highest displays of his mercy, done any thing but what is perfectly just? Did the justice of God require that sinners should be punished eternally, no doubt they would be pu-

nished eternally, for he cannot act contrary to his justice. It cannot well be denied, either, that divine justice does not require the endless punishment of sinners, or that God will, in divers instances, fail to do what his justice requires. For God to give his son to die for sinners—to deliver them into his hands as mediator—for Christ to judge and punish the impenitent until they submit to his authority, perfectly agrees with every thing made known to us concerning divine justice; and proves (as in every case the Deity must be supposed to do that which is most right and just for him to do) that if limited punishment be what he will inflict, endless punishment would not be consistent with his justice; for if it be consistent with his justice to adopt the former plan of punishment, it cannot be consistent with it to adopt the latter, the two plans being in direct opposition both in principle and object; consequently, both cannot be consistent with divine justice; but that which God adopts must be perfectly equitable. Dr. R. will admit that it is perfectly consistent with the justice of God for him to pardon penitent sinners in the present state, and that its being just for him to do it by no means diminishes his *grace* manifested in their salvation. Why then should he hesitate to admit, that it may be perfectly consistent with his justice to restore the wicked hereafter, when they are sufficiently humbled, without

the justice of his conduct in doing it in the least diminishing the mercy and grace manifested in their restoration? But,

4thly, Suppose we were, for argument's sake, to admit that eternal punishment would be just, it would not follow that God *will* punish sin as long as he might justly punish it: yea, Dr R. will hardly deny that it is possible for us to know, with certainty, that God will not punish sin so long as he in justice might, according to *his* ideas of divine justice. The Dr. will allow that himself and many others, who he believes will suffer no punishment hereafter, deserved eternal punishment, and that God might have punished them to all eternity without violating his justice. On what ground does he believe that himself and many others, who acknowledge they deserve endless punishment, will not suffer to all eternity? I presume on the ground of divine revelation, and the mercy of God to sinners in Jesus Christ. On the same ground we believe that the punishment of sin will not be endless. We are told in the Scriptures that Christ died *for all*, and I know of no charter given to a part to limit all the benefits of his death to themselves—that *he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied*—that *he must reign until all enemies be destroyed, and all things made subject to him*—and that *when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to the Father, God will be all in all*: but

if ever he completely *see of the travail of his soul*, multitudes, for whom he travailed, will not be eternally lost—if *every enemy be destroyed*, surely sin and death will not always remain—if *all be made subject to him*, none will endlessly remain in opposition to him—if God ever *become all in all*, sin and misery, which are directly contrary to him, must cease to be any thing in any one.

What propriety can there be in Dr. R.'s bidding Universalists beware that they *are not accessory to the longer punishment of the damned*? He supposes that they will be punished to all eternity,—How then is it possible we should be accessory to their *longer* punishment? Might not Universalists, with greater propriety, caution *him* to beware that *he* be not accessory to their longer punishment, by leading them to suppose that the commission of one sin, and that of the least magnitude, will expose them to as long a punishment as a million of the most aggravated transgressions; and that adding sin to sin will not add to the duration of their punishment?

But I would forbear such remarks, because they do not add to the arguments on either side of the question, which must be decided by Scripture evidence; and because all good men, whatever may be their opinions on particular subjects, wish to discountenance vice and promote virtue; this I

believe to be the case with respect to the Dr. however much I may differ from him in my judgment upon particular points.

This letter being already extended to a greater length than I intended, I hasten to subscribe myself,

Yours, &c.

WISBEACH.

R. WRIGHT.

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

FROM THE FIRST
SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT

BY
JOHN HUTCHINGS

LETTER IV.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING already examined Dr. R.'s principal arguments against the doctrine of the Restitution, and in support of eternal punishment, I will only add cursory remarks on a few other passages in his Sermon, which have not been already noticed.

Having shewn, in my third Letter, that the restitution will be effected by grace, and through the mediation of Jesus Christ, it cannot be necessary for me to take particular notice of what the Dr. hath advanced (p. 27.) on the contrary supposition. I hope, I have left no room for him to say any thing more about discordant songs in heaven: having avowed, what I believe to be the general sentiment of *universalists*, that all the restored will be indebted to the favor of God in Jesus Christ for their restoration. If he be desirous of examining the song in which, we suppose, all the restored will unite, he may find an account of it in the Apoca-

lypse, chap. v. 13. where every creature which is in he ven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, (which surely must comprehend all intelligent creatures that we have any knowledge of,) are represented as joining in one chorus of praise, and saying, “ Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

I know of no advocate for the Universal Restitution who maintains that the wicked will go from hell to heaven ; what the Dr. has said upon this head needs no reply, as it has nothing to do with the subject in dispute, and only proves that he is but little acquainted with the ideas of those whose sentiments he is zealous to decry.

I agree with Dr. R. that *a title to heaven would be of little use to unholy souls, without a taste for heaven* ; but what advocate for the Universal Restitution ever supposed they could receive a title to real happiness in any sense, much less to the happiness of heaven, until turned from their sins ? The restoration is uniformly, by those who maintain it, said to be a restoration from sin to purity. So far from asserting that unholy persons can enter into the New Jerusalem, we do not suppose that, when restored from the second death, they will have any place in that city. Consequently what

the Dr. hath said on these points cannot in the least affect the Doctrine of the Restitution.

He asks, (p. 28.) “ How will this *great change* [the restoration of the wicked] be effected?” Suppose we could acquire no information upon this point, would it follow that no such event ought to be expected? Surely not. If the thing itself be revealed in the Scriptures, will Dr. R. say we ought to reject it because we do not know the exact process by which it will be accomplished? As well might he refuse to believe that all things were created, out of nothing, by the divine power, because he cannot describe the exact process by which they were brought into being; or that God himself exists, because he is a stranger to the modus of his existence. When Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, the Dr. will admit he did not know the way which the Most High would take to accomplish the things which were revealed to him. He will agree that it is our duty to believe whatever God hath spoken, however much we may be in the dark with respect to the way in which it will be effected. This much, however, we learn from the Scriptures, that Christ *is able to subdue all things unto himself*—that *he must reign till he hath done it*—that it will be effected through his mediation—and that future punishment will be one mean which he will employ to effect it. The business

is in good hands, and there can be no room to doubt but that God will find proper means to accomplish it. If the Dr. were asked, by a sceptic, how the scattered dust of past generations can ever be formed into living bodies again, he would, no doubt, find an answer, and the same answer would be sufficient in the present case.

What the Dr. hath said about free-will (p. 29.) by no means involves the restitution in uncertainty; for though God will ever treat his creatures as free intelligent beings, yet they will never become independent of him or of his government; nor will he suffer his counsel to be overturned, and his designs to be defeated by the machinations of the enemy.

It is not supposed by us, that the wicked will be conquered and made virtuous by mere torment, only that their sufferings may conduce to their conviction of the evil and bitter nature of sin, in order to their being fitted to become recipients of divine mercy, by which they will be healed and restored; consequently, what the Dr. (p. 29.) has said to prove that virtue extorted by torment would be suspicious, is nothing to the purpose.

Would it be asking too much to request Dr. R. to make himself better acquainted with the sentiments of Restitutionists before he again undertakes their refutation?

Again, he says, (p. 30.) "If some ages of severe torment will infallibly produce this good effect, how is it that sinners are so often hardened under sufferings in this life? And how is it that Satan and some of his angels, at least, do not melt already?"

I answer, 1. Many cases might be brought to prove that though sinners have been hardened under sufferings at first, yet when the hand of God hath been laid more heavily upon them, they have relented. Several instances of this occur in the Old Testament.

2. It is said, (Isa. xxvi. 9.) "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness;" yet it is said, "When thy hand is lifted up they will not see; but," it is added, "they shall see, and be ashamed;" (*i. e.*) thy hand shall be lifted up in the execution of thy judgments, until they be awakened, and convinced of their sin and folly.

3. I suppose the Dr. will admit, that the sufferings of this life are nothing in comparison of the sufferings of a future state; yet that the sufferings of this life are sometimes the means of bringing sinners to seek after God, he will not deny. Can it then be unreasonable to conclude that such will be the effect of the far more dreadful sufferings of a future state? Will he not also admit, that, as *God doth not afflict willingly*, all the sufferings of

the present state have a tendency to bring men to reflection, that they may be humbled before the Lord: and how will he prove that the sufferings of the wicked hereafter will not have the same tendency? That sufferings in the present life have not always a good effect, may be accounted for by considering that sinners do not, generally, view them as coming from the hand of God, nor consider sin as the cause of them; no wonder, then, that they are not humbled under the divine hand; but he knows that they must have very different ideas when under future punishment.

Further, he must be aware that men in this life, however great their sufferings, find many alleviations, many things to divert their attention and dissipate their thoughts; but that none of these circumstances can exist in the future state of punishment; consequently, it by no means follows that, because men are sometimes hardened under afflictions here, they will be hardened under their incalculably more dreadful sufferings hereafter.

Besides, God, who, in divers instances in the present life, makes afflictions answer a salutary end, will know how to make future punishment subserve a wise and benevolent purpose.

4. With respect to Satan and his angels, I suppose the Dr. believes they have never experienced their proper punishment; but that they are reserved under chains of darkness unto the judg-

ment of the great day; of course he ought not to be at all surprised that their punishment has not had its effect before they are fully subjected to it.

What Dr. R. says (p. 31.) of the punishment of the wicked being increased for *daily crimes in hell*, is mere conjecture, and has not the least countenance in the sacred writings; in them we read of men being punished for deeds done *in the body*, for crimes committed *on earth*; but never for what was *not* done in the body, for crimes committed *in hell*: but he was not aware that, by bringing forward crimes done in hell as an argument for eternal torments, he was, in effect, admitting that eternal torments would not be a just punishment if considered as attaching to sinners merely on account of crimes committed on earth, the only crimes for which God hath ever threatened men with punishment. As if sensible that endless misery would be too severe a punishment for the crimes of this transitory life, he brings forward daily crimes in hell to help the matter out. If it could be proved that the wicked will continue sinning to all eternity, it would follow that they ought to be punished to all eternity; but the former is utterly incapable of proof.

Again, the Dr. affirms, (p. 25.) that "The only restitution of all things of which any of the

prophets have spoken, is that which will be completed at the second coming of Christ;" and he refers to Acts, iii. 21. in support of his affirmation; but no such thing is asserted in that passage. The words are "Whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things." It is not said until those times are completed. If those times commence before or at the second coming of Christ, the event will be as the apostle expressed it; and, I conceive, those times will commence with the complete restoration of the Jews.

The phrase *times of restitution* evidently implies that all things will not be restored at once; but that the restitution will be effected by degrees, at different periods or times: and though these times will commence at the second coming of Christ, we know not how long they may continue; only this we know, that they cannot terminate, from the very nature of the case, until the restitution of all things be completed, though ages of ages should elapse before their termination.

I hope I shall not be thought uncandid if I say Dr. R. has discovered great want of argument in his attack upon the *universal restitution scheme*; that he asked questions where he ought to have produced proofs; that many of his questions have

nothing immediately to do with the truth or falsehood of the doctrine which he was desirous of refuting; consequently, our answering them cannot be necessary in order to our maintaining our ground: for this reason I have left several of his questions unnoticed; but I have not, knowingly, left any thing in his Sermon unexamined which appeared to me of any weight in the controversy.

I appeal to the Dr.'s conscience whether he did not introduce some of his questions with a view to embarrass, perplex, and entangle those who are favourers of the universal doctrine, without having any conception that they would tend to elucidate the subject in dispute. I do not affirm that this was the case; but, believing him to be a good man, I put it to his own conscience to decide how far that was in reality the case.

Again, I appeal to *him* whether he has not, in some instances, made use of language rather calculated to catch the passions and prejudices of his readers, and turn them in favour of his own system, than to stir them up to a serious and impartial examination of the subject in dispute, which is, undoubtedly, of great importance, as it relates to the future destinies of millions of men, and consequently, ought to be examined

with the utmost seriousness and impartiality. I
remain,

Dear Sir,

Sincerely and affectionately,

Yours, &c.

WISBEACH.

R. WRIGHT.



